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# Influence of Popular Culture on Character Formation in the Contemporary Croatian Children's Novel

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## Abstract

*The influence of popular culture on the contemporary children's novel is multifaceted and complex, and is reflected in all levels of discourse. This paper discusses the elements and strategies of popular culture which we can observe in the contemporary Croatian children's novel (more specifically, novels published from 1970 up to the present, that is, in the period in which popular culture had a remarkable boom), which are visible in the concepts of designing novelistic characters. Through analytical insight into the characters of individual children's novels written in that period, with respect to various aspects such as complexes of world-views and ideas, linguistic habitus, social and psychological basis of characters, the child-adult opposition, the role of gender stereotypes, and determination by typical motifs of modern pop-culture practices (primarily related to urban areas as centres of entertainment and consumption), we detect the manner and extent of the influence of popular culture in the context of the modern Croatian children's novel. This is, on the one hand, considered given the general attitude of popular culture and literature for children (both older, and here thematised, contemporary) and, on the other hand, connected to postmodern determinants of contemporary social and cultural (especially literary), practices.*

**Key words:** *characters; consumerism; contemporary Croatian children's novel; popular culture; postmodernism*

## Introduction: The Progression of Popular Culture in the Contemporary Society

Although we can discuss the impact of popular culture on literature, as well as on other areas of human activity in the context of past periods (cf. Kolanović, 2011, p. 45)

when the division between high and popular culture was much stronger and more transparent, there is no doubt that this influence was never as pronounced as in the 20th century, especially in its second half. If we understand the term “*popular*” in its most contemporary sense - in the sense that it refers to “what most people like”, that is, “a work deliberately focused on attracting the majority of the people” (Williams, 1985, p. 237) - it is easy to come to the conclusion that it is the very elements of popular approaches which have significantly marked human actions in the last 50 years. The influence of elements of popular approaches on the cultural field is generally indicated by the phrase *popular culture*, and its models and ways of functioning are, of course, found in all areas of artistic and cultural activity. Such a massive influence of popular culture roughly coincides with the strengthening of those forces which are in most theoretical views recognised as postmodernism, where relativizing the so-called high and low, i.e., setting up different types of testimony in a relationship of equality, is among its most significant features (cf. Being, 2000; Lyotard, 2005 ; McHale, 1987). Indeed, some theoretical views mark popular culture as a ‘culture of remains’, underlining its inferior and mass position with regard to the so-called high culture (Storey, 2001). The postmodernist view, which is primarily an attitude of doubt and scepticism, is the world-view and poetic paradigm which supports and intensifies the eclectic relationship between high and popular culture, while at the same time it does not exclude those discourses that were already clearly separated, such as theoretical discourses of philosophy, sociology and politics (cf. Butler, 2007).

Popular culture is an essential component of modern society, which has integrated into all its pores - media presentations, films, fashion, all kinds of art, technology, design, sports, food and entertainment (Labas & Mihovilović, 2011, pp. 95-96). The contemporary literary production cannot, and usually does not want to escape it either. Particularly interesting is the relationship between popular culture and children’s literature - both for reasons arising from the very nature of children’s literature and its specificities in relation to literature written for adults, and for reasons arising from the uniqueness of the communication process that takes place between a children’s book and a child.

## **Popular Culture and Children’s Literature**

Due to the modern society, open to global and commercial impacts, the laws of the market direct developments in the field of literature as well, both for adults and for children, which in turn leads to an even greater influence of popular culture on the literary world. On the other hand, literary texts determined by certain elements of reality in which they are incurred, return to the same reality, finding their consumers in it, shaping their world-view and their aesthetic paradigms. Popular culture thus functions as an element that is simultaneously part of the real world and part of literature - moving from one habitat, it is reflected in the other, and vice versa. It is possible to talk about intertextual communication between the discourse of extra-literary and literary reality,

between the texts of popular culture and everyday life from which they emerge, but to which they are also returned (cf. Fiske, 2001).

Children's literature is in an even more exposed position than literature for adults. In fact, the traditional relationship between theory and literary criticism and texts for children is known, where children's literature has, historically, often had a status of 'lower' literature, which has, in turn, automatically brought it nearer to those qualitatively inferior positions from which popular literature was observed (Narančić Kovač, 2010). Although often unjustified, the reasons of such convergence can still partly be sought in those determinants of children's literature which set it apart from the literature for adults. First of all, the fact is that although children's literature is primarily intended for children, "in children's literature it is the adults who really have the last word" (Narančić Kovač, 2010, p. 645). Namely, no matter that the implicit reader is a child, the adults are the ones who manage what they think the child should 'get' from a piece of literature, in accordance with what they think is important for the child's aesthetic and social development (cf. Glazer, 1997). Kos-Lajtman also discusses the inability of children's literature to resist market demands, regardless of its symbolic value, noting that "a child as the ultimate consumer is not the only link in generating a children's literary text's life, i.e. the process of acquiring its social legitimacy" (Kos-Lajtman, 2011, p. 62). This process includes a "range of different social factors, starting with the parents, kindergartens, schools, media, publishers, critics, and marketing" (Kos-Lajtman, 2011, p. 62), all of which in some way influence the process of social certification of a text in a socio-historical area. The author, moreover, points out that in relation to 'adult' literature, the situation in the field of children's literature is more complex:

Due to specific skills, child readers are a very critical and 'picky' group, since at the same time they are readers who are not in a social position of power, nor are they able to articulate their own demands, wishes and criteria. Therefore, their interests are regularly managed by adults - publishers, media, teachers, critics, parents - as a kind of mediators between the author/text on the one hand, and children as readers on the other. Such a situation means that children's writers, if they want a good reception, have to 'hit' two targets at the same time: the centre of children's imagination and experience of the world (which results in the ability of identifying themselves with the characters, events and thoughts, which is a must in an adequate children's reception) and the centre of the expectations of adults, namely, those who judge, choose, decide, and, finally, formally valorise on behalf of the child. (Kos-Lajtman, 2011, pp. 62-63)

Therefore, we are dealing with complicating the traditional markets with symbolic values in order to double individual positions, i.e. the 'intermediary' roles of adults, while in turn these roles, along with their aesthetic, ethical and educational objectives, are often guided by financial and/or ideological ones (cf. Kos-Lajtman, 2011, pp. 63-64).

What makes children's literature distinctive is also its traditional closeness to folk literature (cf. Narančić Kovač, 2010, p. 646; Hameršak, 2011, pp. 76-79), which also

contributes to its receptional and theoretical approximation to popular culture, as well as its propensity toward simple, recognisable genre forms. Neither, however, implies an unconditional correlation with popular literature and culture (Narančić Kovač, 2010, pp. 648-649), unless there are other elements to confirm this. Namely, the problem of the relationship between popular culture and children's literature is neither simple nor single, and we shall also consider the different parameters that affect it and the elements that identify it in the analysis of what we are here primarily interested in, and that is the impact of popular culture on the contemporary Croatian children's novel with regard to character formation. The fact is, namely, that the changes in the approach to the modern children's novel, compared to the traditional, are sometimes visible already in the basic characteristics, and there are certainly no textual levels at which they would be so obvious and subject to reader reception like the level of character. Popular culture plays a big role in the method of accessing the presentation of characters, not only the psychological and physical, but also social, moral, linguistic and other facilities present in the creation of such entities in contemporary children's and teen novels. The study of it is all the more interesting, because pop-culture dynamics, perhaps more than any other sphere of culture, indicates *mental changes*, i.e. the forces that affect changes in attitudes, values, norms and images in a society (Kolanović, 2011, p. 40). When it comes to texts intended for young recipients in the most intense stages of their cognitive, emotional, moral, and aesthetic development, such research seems even more essential.

## Characters in the Contemporary Croatian Children's Novel from the Perspective of Popular Culture

The influence of popular culture on the formation of characters in contemporary Croatian children's novels can be viewed at multiple levels, from which we deem the following to be crucial: the level of world-view, the social and psychological level, the level of language habitus, the level of gender stereotypes, and the level of incidence of new characters, the direct constructs of popular culture. For this analysis we shall use ten contemporary children's novels: *Smogovci* (1976) and *Eko, eko* [Eco, Eco] (1979) by Hrvoje Hitrec, *Čvrsto drži joy-stick!* [Firmly Hold the Joystick!] (1994) by Josip Cvenić, *Mrvica iz dnevnog boravka* [Crumbs from the Living Room] (1995) by Sanja Pilić, *Debeli* [Fatty] (2002) by Silvija Šesto Stipaničić, *Zvijeri plišane* [Plush Beasts] (2008) by Zoran Krušvar, *Kora od jabuke* [The Apple Peel] by Jadranka Klepac (2008), *Zeleni pas* [The Green Dog] (2009) by Nada Mihelčić, *Imaš fejs?* [Got Facebook?](2011) by Jasminka Tihi-Stepanić and *Nemoj reći nikome* [Don't Tell Anyone] (2012) by Maja Brajko-Livaković. Given that a significant interweaving of popular culture and literature came about in the 1970s, a period in which theoretical considerations were usually associated with the breakthrough of postmodernist procedures, the novels used in the analysis relate exactly to the time slot that includes the last 40 years. The analysis, of course, could have involved many other novels, since the interference of popular culture and 'high' literature is now almost ubiquitous, but for practical and methodological reasons we have narrowed the observed corpus to ten novels.

## ***The Level of the Characters' World-View***

### **a) Obsession with Ideals of Beauty**

The characters' worldview in the modern novel is often shaped by consumer culture. Consumer culture, as part of popular culture, defines what it means to belong to something, sets conditions of our way of life, and shows us our place in society (cf. Hedges, 2001, p. 29). People have become commodities like consumer products which do not have their own value in themselves because in consumer culture someone's value is measured by the sum of money someone is able to spend, the way they dress, where higher value is placed on 'brand-name' clothes, and the like. In other words, our personal style is defined by what we hear or spend, and this, in turn, is often in such an environment confused with individualism (cf. Hedges, 2001, pp. 43-48).

The consumerist worldview is especially prominent in the novel *Don't tell anyone* (2012) by Maja Brajko-Livaković. The girl, Tena, is proud of the talent for identifying trends and fashion and she can perfectly combine hairstyles, clothes, shoes and jewellery. She is involved with a boy, Fran, a son of wealthy parents, who wears 'brand-named' clothes, so Tena helps her mother in her hair salon in order to save enough pocket money to buy famous brand name products and to reach Fran in this manner. She is entertained by walking through shops so famous perfumes, such as *Chanel No. 5*, *Lovely* by Sarah Jessica Parker, *Pupa Love* and others can be found in her collection, as well as *Swarovski* earrings, a silver *Samsung* mobile phone, etc. Such an emphasis on the external undoubtedly testifies to the value priorities that we find in the example of Tena, which can, on the one hand, be correlated with the traditional attitude of society towards women, and on the other hand, just with the attitude of the modern consumer society that often puts the external in the foreground. Wolf points out that (i) women are now valued by 'beauty', which makes them look for external approval (cf. Wolf, 2008, p. 24). She further states that because of the media emphasis on the importance of beauty, women often see one another as a threat, rather than resisting the 'moulds', (cf. Wolf, 2008, p. 94). As beauty is the imperative to be reached in popular culture, Tena compares herself to another girl, Petra, who she thinks is her competitor - she ponders on how she herself is more beautiful and thinner than Petra and whether Petra's hair is natural or dyed. In her leisure time, she reads the teenage magazine *OK!* where there is a fashion section, considers the so-called Moon diet, goes to a beautician for hair removal, 'likes' *Facebook* images of slender girls at a fashion website, follows the new Dior fragrances on Google. She is especially impressed by Petra's compliment on her vamp look, 'just like a cover girl' (Brajko-Livaković, 2012, p. 119), so she confides to Petra that as a small girl she craved to be a model and that perfumes, shop windows, photos, exhibitions and *a nose piercing* are equivalents of happiness for her.

Another girl close to Tena's world-view is certainly Lada from the novel *Fatty* (2002) by Silvija Šesto. In this case, the influence of consumer culture is not expressed as much through the possession of material goods, as it is through the standards imposed by the

media<sup>1</sup>. In popular culture, consumer products aim to entice consumers by excluding their power of discernment, so popular culture is largely devoted to the language of the body. Today, the pursuit of beauty and the aesthetic perfection of the body is central to the ideology of consumption (cf. Bećirbašić, 2011, p. 15), and the idea that beauty is a fundamental value, which has to be achieved at all costs, has been growing stronger since the 19th century (Eco, 2004, p. 330). Eco notes that by pointing out a model of beauty offered by commercial consumption, the mass media actually returned to the iconography of the 19th century and that anorexic models are a perfect example of this (Eco, 2004, pp. 418, 426).

In the novel by Šesto Stipaničić, Lada's very first sentence directly shows her obsession with looks, imposed by the consumer culture in the media: "I am Lada, and I'm fat. Whichever way I look. I'm fat in reality and in photographs. I've got that stupid look on my face which all obese people have. Makes me mad. Something between laughter and tears." (Šesto Stipaničić, 2007, p. 5).

As a small child, Lada would constantly watch her reflection in the windshields of cars, and later, she does the same using shop windows. Every time she sees a skinny beauty, she reaches for popular products like herbal teas and packets of chewing gum that promise to help her achieve the desired appearance through weight loss. After a rationally expected failure, Lada takes up the habit of smoking because of the belief that cigarettes would kill her appetite. Apart from that, the heroine resorts to more drastic measures such as deliberately induced vomiting which leads to bulimia, a widespread disease of contemporary culture. It is also clear that her excessive weight is largely a result of the brisk pace of the modern age in which parents do not have time to prepare healthy food, but widely consume preserved and ready-made foods.

In the technological age, the body is subordinate to manipulation, becoming an economic good and a product for exchange (cf. Bećirbašić, 2011, pp. 52, 79). The media today use the language which speaks to us on a personal level, thus gaining our confidence by telling us that every choice has been made for us (cf. Bećirbašić, 2011, p. 53). Through articles about dieting, skin care and surgeries, they sell to women something that money can buy, where, actually, in the background of such articles a subtle idea is woven - that nothing stands in the modern woman's way to success, happiness, and personal satisfaction. Magazines, at the same time, cause self-loathing in consumers, through focusing on uniform advertisements and photographs (cf. Wolf, 2008, pp. 87, 91).

In the novel *Fatty*, Šesto Stipaničić presented an expected attitude of the popular society towards people who do not fit the ideals created by popular culture. Lada, who considers herself outside the standards of beauty, recalls how she and a boy, Silvio, were bullied in school because of their weight, and how they felt like "two drowning people

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<sup>1</sup> This implies the media standards related to appearance. For example, although the average weight of people is on the rise, the media popularise an extremely lean body ideal (cf. Kuhar, 2005, p. 100), persuade us to surgically repair our 'imperfections', use different types of diet products, and the like. (cf. Kuhar, 2001).

floating in the ocean, waiting to become a snack for sea monsters” (Šesto Stipaničić, 2007, p. 25). The bullying did not cease even after Lada’s trips to the gym, regardless of weight loss, because in the eyes of her relatives she was still fat. However, Lada herself shows us the state of popular society. Despite being overweight herself, she does not want to associate with fat people. She describes Dubravka, who shows interest in her, as a fat ‘freak’, and as for Silvio, who had previously been overweight, she says: “Silvio has become a real hottie. This was another proof that under the fat people’s real beauty can be found, you just have to peel off the thickness and the result is visible.” (Šesto Stipaničić, 2007, p. 106). This attitude is particularly absurd and interesting in many ways because it comes from a person who herself is outside the popular canon of beauty. Lada’s obsession with appearance culminates in her thought to herself about how she could begin using drugs in order to achieve thinness.

On the other hand, knowing what being obsessed with appearance means, Lada was able to recognise it in others, especially in her mother, who was obsessed with the size of her breasts. Lada’s friend, Ivana, is preoccupied with the same problem. Though recognised as a beautiful girl, she is dissatisfied with the size of her breasts, comparing them with Lada’s. Lada, however, sees her as a snob, because she refuses a boy who invited her for kebabs instead of a fancy dinner, but also because in her collection there are examples of decorative cosmetics inaccessible to her. The above testifies to the perpetuation of a troubled mental pattern, for which she herself suffered, within the framework of Lada’s character.

In the novel *Fatty*, showing the importance of the material in a modern society is Lada’s desire for a mobile phone - the girl wants a mobile phone and considers it prestigious, although she does not really know what she would do with it. Similar difficulties with a mobile phone, as something that is unavoidable in today’s everyday life, can be found in Vlatka’s sister in the novel *The Green Dog* by Nada Mihelčić (2009). After the financial collapse of the family due to the debts made by the drug-addict eldest daughter, her sister, who is also the narrator of the novel, she is forced to inherit her mother’s old mobile phone which is considered ‘junk’ compared to the cell phones of her peers (cf. Mihelčić, 2009, p. 211).

Furthermore, although the girl Kata in the novel *Got Facebook?* (2011) by Jasminka Tihi-Stepanić is not burdened with looks like the aforementioned female characters, even in her, the impact of popular culture in shaping a world-view associated with beauty is visible. So the girl says: “Beauty is something that we, the girls, are constantly haunted by. Even I, who am all about intellectualism, must admit that I long to be considered beautiful” (Tihi-Stepanić, 2011, p. 57). From her thoughts, the advantage that popular culture gives to the ideals of beauty over intellect can be read, which a chapter title in the novel *Don’t Tell Anyone* that says “Pretty girls get a better job” (Brajko-Livaković, 2012, p. 125) also ironically indicates.

In the novel *Crumbs from the Living Room* (1995) by Sanja Pilić, the boy, Janko, and his sister Marina, and their required reading episode, are particularly interesting regarding



the aspects of the impact of consumer culture on the formation of world-views. Marina, a typical teenager, does not like to read but begs her brother to do her book report, and Janko agrees, provided she pays him. It is evident that helping a sibling is not in the foreground, but earning a profit instead. Not only the children, however, are under the influence of consumer culture, but also their parents, who give them money for performing household chores, thus sending their children the message that the priority is to earn money, which can also be seen in some contemporary novels. The father once explains to Janko that he will become a man only when he has an *American Express* card, and Janko himself notes that there was never a single day without his parents discussing money.

Perhaps the impact of consumer culture on the formation of the characters' worldviews is most clearly seen in the statement by Marina's mother in the modern novel for children and young people *Got Facebook?* Namely, after learning that Marina sells cheat sheets, her teacher asks her mother to meet her at the school. The mother, after driving to the school in a red convertible, says, with an upturned nose: "Marina is playing the market. She knows how to cash in on her knowledge! Whose fault is it that these fools can't even make their own cheatsheets?" (Tihi-Stepanić, 2011, p. 50). This example is interesting because it shows that the authors, regardless of how aware they are that pop-culture mostly affects young people, do not approach the characters in a formulaic manner, not even from the standpoint of age division. The above example shows that the ethically questionable world-view, that would be a lot more expected among young people, who are more susceptible to the influence of society and the media, often affects the elderly as well, and even their parents. On the other hand, although the young are generally (in contemporary novels) portrayed as those who are targeted by fashionable ideas and values, not all of them are unconditionally like that. In some novels, children who have not succumbed to popular influences, or for some other reason differ from peer majority, are placed in the focal point of narration. Such is the case of the protagonist Dana in the novel *The Apple Peel* (2008). Aware of the world-view and aesthetic trends admired by her peers, the girl does not subscribe to them, but, on the contrary, is very critical of them, managing to preserve her identity:

Everyone just gets on my nerves. You cannot pass a newsstand, without being shoved a dose of silicone in someone's mouth. Or chest. Or cheeks. Or the smooth faces of older actresses or politicians full of Botox. Newspapers, television. Ads, commercials, billboards.

Sexy girls promote cars and boats, nude girls advertise beer, chocolate, cheese, yoghurt. One could conclude that here it's always summer and that our entire population consists mainly of scantily clad blondes. (. . .)

In addition to silicone and Botox, from each kiosk, newspaper or television, you're attacked by anorexic, baggy thirteen-year-old models (kids, they are younger than me!) looking completely futuristic with pursed lips and nails painted black, just like articles about liposuction in magazines for young people.



Or quick diets. With the help of amphetamines, cocaine, and the like.

I think the world has just gone mad. Maaaaaaad! (Klepac, 2008, pp. 30-31)

### **b) Urban Spaces as Elements of World-Views**

Going to shopping centres, and not solely for the purpose of shopping, is a ritual for a large number of people today, and it is becoming more popular among the younger generations as well. Equivalent to the above, contemporary novels for children and young people most frequently place their characters in urban areas as centres of entertainment and consumption, i.e. basic pop-culture practices. Some of the main topoi of events are urban spaces such as squares, bookstores, cafes, cinemas and *discos*, that shape the characters' worldviews, drawing them into the world of popular culture and its practices. In contemporary Croatian children's novels, there is a notable domination of the city of Zagreb and its famous structures such as the main square, Ilica, Jarun lake, the Dolac market, and so on.

These city structures particularly stand out in the novel by Tihi-Stepanić *Got Facebook?* (2011) and Brajko-Livaković's *Don't Tell Anyone* (2012). For example, in the first novel, a girl called Nataly arranges a date at the Avenue Mall in the *Elephant* cafe and attends ballet at Ilirski Square, her aunt Biba visits a Zagreb library, Tommy Boy waits in a cafe in Dubrava, a boy called Kiki celebrates his birthday on Budek lake, a girl, Kata, lives in Novi Zagreb, where she spends her time at a local park with Domagoj and sometimes goes to the *Plazza* to do the shopping with her mother, Kata's brother Buha visits Jarun Lake with his father, etc. In the novel *Don't Tell Anyone*, the story takes place at Ban Jelačić Square, where Tena spends her time with Fran, loves going to the shops and cinemas, children roam Masarykova Street, the Flower Market, Varšavska and Gundulićeva Streets, etc. Similar topoi can be noticed in most other novels as well, especially those written in the last 15 years. For instance, in the novel *the Apple Peel*, the heroine Dana and her friend Ruta unquestionably decide to spend their Saturday morning going shopping before their class trip to Dubrovnik: "Listen, girl, what about a little walk through the shops? I've got nothiiiiing to wear! I also need shorts. And specs - this was Ruta's proposal." (Klepac, 2008, p. 11). Such sites, of course, contribute to the believability and realism of the portrayed.

### **c) Relationship to Socially Marginal Topics**

Popular culture breaks taboos in various fields, thus contributing to the incidence of figures that have not been largely present in children's novels in earlier periods. In portraying such figures there is a transparent attitude that popular culture holds toward them. Although, for example, characters with disabilities or homosexual characters appear as an integral part of the whole spectrum of characters in children's novels, the relationship of popular culture is somewhat restrained with regard to their design. Filled with contradictions, popular culture at the same time undoubtedly acts on their introduction into the world of children's literature, emphasizing clarification of motifs and themes that had previously had a taboo status, while, on the other hand, they are

often formed as somewhat stereotypical, which, in turn, is in line with the still prevailing world-view of today's society.

An example of a child with disabilities can be found in the novel *Eco, Eco* (1979) by Hrvoje Hitrec. Krcko is a boy who laughs at everything and does not know how to play, a physically strong boy who tries to step on his own shadow for fun, watches television commercials, cannot dress very well, speaks briefly and meaninglessly and has never attended school. When Vesna's mother suggests to Krcko's mother that he should get a treatment, his own mother replies that there's nothing anyone can do. Krcko thus experiences vilification, not only from the wider community but also from the members of his immediate family. Social exclusion of a character with mental disabilities so faithfully reflects the dominant world-view of the second half of the 20th century. Although the situation in this area has somewhat improved, such a world-view is still largely present, due to the fact that popular culture is still primarily oriented to some other priorities, among which persons with disabilities are rarely found. More often, as already mentioned, they are values that have been generated by the demands of the market.

The novel *Plush Beasts* (2008) by Zoran Krušvar is very important because, as it is sometimes said, it is the first Croatian children's novel in which there appear homosexual characters (cf. Cvrtila, 2009). The main characters of the novel are plush animals whose sexual orientation is not determined, in contrast to the sexual orientation of supporting characters. In this novel, popular culture pushes boundaries, forming the liberal world-view of the main characters (Grga the teddy, Mrkvoje the rabbit, Verica the squirrel, Maki the monkey, Kornelija the tortoise, etc.) toward persons of homosexual orientation. However, the pop-culture liberal world-view of the characters is opposed to the traditional view of the world in which the parents are female and male (cf. Matulić, 2002) as shown in the worries of the girl Doris' parents, who do not fully understand her choice. But the question is whether the parents are actually worried because they are aware of their own world-view due to which they do not mind their daughter's choice, or because they are aware of the kind of obstacles she would later face in her life. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether *Plush Beasts* is really the first novel featuring characters of homosexual orientation, considering the novel *Fatty*, where there is also a female character, Sanja, who is homosexual. Although her sexual preferences are not discussed to a greater extent, her admission that she romantically prefers girls rather than boys is still significant. The influence of popular culture in these examples is definitely moving in the direction of breaking taboos and talking about topics which had not been previously discussed in the novels aimed at children and/or young people.

### ***The Level of the Characters' Social and Psychological Background***

In the modern era, thanks to the influence of popular culture, it is more and more important to be 'grown up'. Children do not want to be treated by adults in accordance with their age, do not want to be spoken to as 'kids' by adults (cf. Domin, 2009), and often

imitate adults, adopting their gestures and habits (cf. Miljković, 1997; Saleb, 2006), their way of dressing, and the like. The occurrence of a kind of inversion of roles is also not rare, so the characters of children often seem more 'grown-up', tackling the problems of adults. This phenomenon can be explained by the influence of popular culture, which, with its contents and standards of behaviour, in some way directs children toward earlier growing up and dealing with serious problems.

The boy Janko from the novel *Crumbs from the Living Room* by Sanja Pilić (1995) is placed in opposition to his parents. They are shown as adults concerned with their dreams and preoccupations, stuck in the period of their youthful hippie phase. Janko's life is not simple at all because he is an above-average intelligent boy who, at the same time, is and is not a child. The unemployed father, a philosopher by trade, mostly loafes about, and his only hobby is making jewellery which he sells at fairs, and dreaming of riches. Instead of being concerned with his children, the father is preoccupied with himself and the thought that he should start working out, and when Janko speaks to him, he ignores it, just like his mother, who deals with trivial matters. The mother works at *Zagreb film* as a colourist, where there is less and less work, so she is preoccupied with meditation, spends her days at the gym, takes care of ecological matters, and the like. Finally, Janko takes on the role of the adult, and because of the difficult financial situation begins to write for *Modra lasta* in order to help the family with their crisis.

With many children, imitating adults also leads to the adoption of negative behaviours, such as alcoholism or smoking. Such a case is embodied in Katica from the novel *Got Facebook?* (2009) by Jasminka Tihi-Stepanić. Encouraged by her friends, Katica accepts cigarettes and alcohol in order to gain acceptance by her peers (Tihi-Stepanić, 2011, p. 65), with her 'heroics' resulting in a trip to the hospital. The impact of values imposed by the dominant popular youth culture is most visible in Katica's justification of her actions: "I explained to them that I never even wanted to drink at all, because I never drink, but everybody drank and I didn't want to appear as a total loser" (Tihi-Stepanić, 2011, pp. 69-70). The modern children's and teenage novel, therefore, often shows that the people who do not accept the popular patterns of behaviour are partially or completely ostracised from society, where, of course, it is clear to what extent peer acceptance is important for young people in their vulnerable, formative years.

Furthermore, the characters presented in the novels belong to different social strata. Lada's parents in the novel *Fatty* work as journalists, so she and her brother are often alone, resulting in Lada's obesity, due to quickly prepared meals and adopting vices (cigarettes), and her brother's irresponsible sexual behaviour that results in his girlfriend, Zinka, having an abortion. Kata, in the novel *Got Facebook?*, is in a similar situation. Her father is a lawyer, and her mother a social educator in a juvenile home, so it is not uncommon for her to spend her days alone. A similar example is found in the form of the girl Morana from the novel *Crumbs from the Living Room*, a daughter of wealthy parents, who is lonely to the point of talking to the shelves in the kitchen. The heroine of the novel *Don't Tell Anyone*, Tena, is not in a better position either. In fact, her father had lost his job so he works undeclared, and her mother works at a hairdresser's all day

in order to afford necessary things for her. The consequences of their lack of time spent together with the girl are reflected in Tena's thoughtlessness, leading her to the jaws of prostitution. The desire for fame and profit in this novel is what primarily drives the main teenage character, and this is precisely one of the most widespread pop-culture constructs of today's society.

Another interesting example is the novel *Don't Tell Anyone* (2012) by Maja Brajko-Livaković, in which the father figure, who is presented as a successful businessman and politician (Deputy Minister), is finally unmasked as a liar and an opportunist who bought his degree to seize a socially desirable position. The author's employment of such forms clearly reflects the need to draw attention to them, precisely because of their frequent occurrence in today's society. A significant fact is that, in the aforementioned novel, the view that everything can be bought with money is transferred to the boy, Fran, who, in the event of his friend Tena being unable to enrol in her desired secondary school, offers her 'help' in the form of using his own father and his political connections. However, such models of behaviour are exposed as bad and worthy of condemnation at the end of the novel.

There is no doubt, therefore, that many authors are aware of the impact of popular culture on the development of social and moral values of children and young people, so they reach for such cases in order to encourage their questioning. Through all these novels, as well as many others, popular culture is, through its capitalist attitude<sup>2</sup> ingrained into the actions and decisions of the characters, where most of the novels also display, very authentically, the current economic situation and the problems related to (un)employment.

### ***The Level of Gender Stereotypes***

Gender stereotypes are simplified and very often distorted mental images that occur in a particular sexual group and include a range of characteristics, whether physical or mental, that describe and define this group, thus creating the so-called social roles (e.g. the division into male and female roles)<sup>3</sup>. The influence of popular culture can, in general, be both positive and negative, depending on which studied segment is in question. Popular culture, using examples of characters in children's novels, abolishes, or at least warns against the deep-rooted gender stereotypes, like the stereotype of women as passive and peaceful creatures, which are primarily good mothers and housewives, and stereotypes of men as aggressive, active, insensitive and educated<sup>4</sup> creatures.

In almost all of the analysed Croatian children's novels, we may find some examples of a very positive pop-culture impact on gender stereotypes. These examples are mainly

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<sup>2</sup> Eagleton explains that the culture of capitalism is certainly the most diverse of all, and thus carries more meaning - marking, among others, the areas related to lifestyle, as well as those which enter the fields of individual arts (cf. Eagleton, 2002, p. 24). For the Frankfurt School, popular culture is a culture produced in order to ensure the continuity and stability of capitalism, i.e., they see it as a form of dominant ideology (cf. Strinati, 2004, p. xiv).

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.zenska-udruga-izvor.hr/uploads/lifleti/LIFLETI%2010/Stereotipi\\_i\\_ravnopravnost\[1\].pdf](http://www.zenska-udruga-izvor.hr/uploads/lifleti/LIFLETI%2010/Stereotipi_i_ravnopravnost[1].pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. [http://www.zenska-udruga-izvor.hr/uploads/lifleti/LIFLETI%2010/Stereotipi\\_i\\_ravnopravnost\[1\].pdf](http://www.zenska-udruga-izvor.hr/uploads/lifleti/LIFLETI%2010/Stereotipi_i_ravnopravnost[1].pdf)

related to the elimination of the division between male and female jobs and a strong predominance of female characters, as female characters usually tend to be the main protagonists.

In the novel *Firmly Hold the Joystick!* (1994) by Josip Cvenić, the boy, Nino, is in love with Jasna, with whom he plays computer games in the hospital. Lacking courage, he does nothing, so the girl takes romantic initiative very convincingly. The stereotypical male-female roles are thus switched here, just as in the novel *Got Facebook?* where Kata also takes the initiative, kissing Domagoj. Also interesting is the situation of the hospital's computer games competition between male and female teams, where girls turn out to be more skilful than boys. Through such a constellation of gender relations, the author also ironically challenges the stereotype that women are worse drivers, considering that the boys and girls competed in a game based on driving Formula 1. The same stereotype is addressed in the novel *Got Facebook?* in a brief description of Kata's aunt Biba who drives like a film character, i.e. a man, with one hand resting on the open window, and the other on the steering wheel: "Biba drove beside her with one hand resting on the open window. That's how they do it in the movies when they want to show you they're a big shot" (Tihi-Stepanić, 2011, p. 80).

The novel *Fatty* plays with the stereotype of the woman-housewife. So Lada's mother is an expert in the "stir, fry, and dump" cuisine (Šesto Stipaničić, 2007, p. 15), which is a synonym for simple and greasy cooking, i.e., junk food. Also, everything that she cooks always burns, and she is not very tidy either, so she just stuffs her clothes, otherwise scattered around the apartment, in the wardrobes, before the guests arrive. Here we find the subversion of one of the most common stereotypes of today, about women as poor drivers, denounced in Lada's statement that her mother is a better driver than her father. The boy Zlatko also appears in the novel as a supporting character, who, despite the popular belief that boys do not gossip, is a real scandalmonger who only hangs out with girls and enjoys violating another person's privacy. Another scandalmonger type is Picko in the novel *Eco, Eco* (1979) by Hrvoje Hitrec, through whom we witness and see the humorous distortion of traditional, patriarchal gender roles - usually, for being drunk, he is often punished by his wife with polishing the floors and listening to her lectures.

Household chores such as cooking and childcare, although not as punishment, are also a preoccupation of Tena's father in the novel *Don't Tell Anyone*, and Kata's father in the novel *Got Facebook?* It is evident, therefore, that the stereotypical division between male and female jobs is being more and more repealed by bringing gender equality to the foreground. Thus, unlike Kata's father, her mother is successful in her business and does not have time for housework, but most decisions related to Kata's upbringing and education are hers. A similar role is played by two women, Vlatka's mother and grandmother in the novel *The Green Dog*. This is a real inversion of traditional gender roles because the mother is the one who gives slaps, while the grandmother is extremely wilful, lucid and active, able to realise all her plans. Such a display of a grandmother contrasts with the image of the kind, sentimental, silver-haired, and ignorant old woman,

often painted for us by children's literature in the past. The grandmother is here shown as a person with an extremely modern and progressive world-view who successfully solves the family's difficulties - she is a grandmother in jeans, with red, dyed hair, who plays pinball and poker, plays the lottery and solves crossword puzzles, and teaches her grandson how to spit far. Another atypical wife, the mother, is embodied in Janko's mother in the novel *Crumbs from the Living Room*. Although clumsy in the kitchen, she is a real master of 'male' jobs like cutting fruit trees and mixing mortar.

That there are no male and female jobs, or hobbies, is also confirmed in the friendship between Vlatka's sister and the boy Marko in the novel *The Green Dog*: Marko braids Vlatka's sister's hair, and she plays football with him. The fact is, however, that no matter how much it strives toward gender openness, contemporary popular culture still has its 'thin places' and stereotypes that are still waiting to be overcome. This is evident in the same novel, in which just after the girl admits that Marko braided her hair, she receives insults from peers, where both children are called derogatory terms for homosexuals.

### ***The Level of New Characters, Constructs of Popular Culture***

Under the influence of widespread motifs and symbols of popular culture, generally popular fantastic characters like robots, aliens and plush animals appear in the Croatian children's novel as well. In this perspective, it is not so important that robots and space travel are no longer (only) elements of the sci-fi genre, but the way popular culture developed and popularised them is still interesting.

Robotko the robot, from the novel *Crumbs from the Living Room*, is thus by no means the embodiment of expensive technological progress but has rather been reduced (under the influence of popular culture) to a pile of interconnected, available household things that come alive in the hands of a child. Janko used everyday objects to produce Robotko who finally comes to life, and in accordance with the prevailing motif in genres and practices of popular culture, the robot is shown with human characteristics. Moreover, Janko's sister Marina wants the robot to have a human voice like Elvis Presley, and his mother Jaca determines its zodiac sign according to the day when it came alive. Robotko itself likes to watch cartoons, especially *Lolek and Bolek*<sup>5</sup>. In fact, as a literary text adapts to the laws of popular culture, so everyday heroes in everyday circumstances are created (cf. Kolanović, 2011, p. 169). The desire to create a being with human characteristics is the focus here, and this desire corresponds to the modern age in general as well. In contemporary society, with scientific progress, the creation of humanlike beings by human beings has also been motivated by popular culture - numerous popular fiction and animated films<sup>6</sup>, as well as children's toys, present the achievements of such advanced technology.

<sup>5</sup> Lolek and Bolek are eponymous characters from a popular Polish cartoon (cf. Šegota, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> For example, in the movie *Star Wars* (1977) by George Lucas, there appear endearing robots R2D2 and C3PO, in Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) there is Ash, the android, in *Terminator* (1984) by James Cameron there is the eponymous cyborg, there is a sophisticated boy-robot in Steven Spielberg's *A.I.* (2001), benevolent and malevolent robots in *I, Robot* (2004) by Alex Proyas, etc. (cf. Hrastovčak, 2013). Regarding animated films, the most famous are *Robots* (2005) by Chris Wedge and Carlos Saldanha, and Andrew Stanton's *Wall-E* (cf. Moj-film.hr, mojtv.hr).

Furthermore, owing to popular culture's questioning whether there is life on other planets, alien characters have also become very popular<sup>7</sup>. Under the influence of popular culture, extra-terrestrial beings are designed very imaginatively in the novel *Eco, Eco* where there are three different forms of extra-terrestrials. As people cannot really tell what aliens look like and whether there are any at all, popular culture had free rein in their design, which is why, for example, there may appear more variants of aliens in a single novel, as in this case.

One of the social objectives recognisable in popular culture is certainly spending as much as possible, and so popular culture tends to popularise certain products. Since children are the best consumers<sup>8</sup>, it is not unusual that plush animals appear as characters in children's fiction. An example is the aforementioned novel *Plush Beasts*, where the girl, Doris, has got more stuffed animals than some shops have (cf. Krušvar, 2008, p. 6). The toys are displayed in an anthropomorphic manner, but in the point of view that is prone to the value scale propagated by elements of popular culture - thus Grga the teddy bear likes to watch action films and dreams of being an action hero, Maki the monkey holds speeches in front of the plush community and so on.

### ***The Level of the Characters' Linguistic Habitus***

Under the influence of popular culture, which essentially characterises the modern society, the Croatian children's novel is increasingly encountering dialects, jargon, loan-words from other languages, invented languages and the language of young people on social networks.

#### **a) Dialect**

Today, dialects are relatively often echoed in the children's novel, mainly through a partial use of dialogues and inner monologues. Kajkavian and Čakavian dialects are most frequent in their 'urbanised' version. Thus, the novel *Smogovci* is almost entirely marked by the urban Kajkavian dialect which allows for the placement of characters and actions in the urban area, bringing the speech of the characters closer to the everyday speech of the reader. In the novel *Don't Tell Anyone*, Čakavian is encountered in some places - we can recognise that Tena's father's family roots are somewhere on the Adriatic coast. Both examples testify that the authors wished to reach for a living,

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<sup>7</sup> Questioning the existence of extra-terrestrial life forms, which is particularly popularised in popular culture, is represented both in literature and in film industry. Thus, extra-terrestrials appear in Larry Niven's *Tales of Known Space* cycle (1964-2009), Robert Silverberg's *Nightwings* (1969), Isaac Asimov's *The Gods Themselves* (1972), Frederik Pohl's *Heechee Saga* (1977-2004), the *Uplift* novels by David Brin, Octavia E. Butler's *Bloodchild* (1984), the *Culture* series by Iain M. Banks, etc. In the world of film, they are represented in *War of the Worlds* by Byron Haskins (1953) and Steven Spielberg (2005), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* by Don Siegel (1956) and Philip Kaufman (1978), *Solaris* by Andrei Tarkovsky (1972) and Steven Soderbergh (2002), Steven Spielberg's *E.T.* (1982), James Cameron's *The Abyss* (1989), Abel Ferrara's *Body Snatchers* (1993), *The X-Files* series (1993-2002) and *The X-Files - Fight the Future* by Rob Bowman (1998), Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* (1997), Paul W. S. Anderson's *Alien vs Predator* (2004), Oliver Hirschbiegel's *The Invasion* (2007), James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009), etc. (cf. Hrastovčak, 2013)

<sup>8</sup> Cf. <http://www.vecernji.hr/hrvatska/djeca-najbolji-potrosaci-812527>



popular language, through which a novelistic text, at a certain level, achieves both authenticity and receptivity.

### b) Slang

As these are novels aimed at specific social groups (contemporary primary school pupils in higher grades and, eventually, high school), slang is heavily represented in almost all novels studied. Jargon is also used in the labelling of certain actions, for example, slang words such as *klopati*, *smlaviti*, *slistiti* and *tamaniti* (*Fatty*) for eating, the slang phrase *povampiriti se* means to fall in love, *zekati se* means joking; *profurati* means to start dating somebody, and so on. The primary function of slang in a literary text - and there is almost no modern children's novel with the theme of everyday life in which slang does not find its place - is achieving the authenticity in relation to the reality of young readers. This approach undoubtedly facilitates identification, i.e. supports reception.

Slang is also often used for naming people (*alkos* - alcoholics, *starci* - parents, *profrač* - teacher, *frajer* - a handsome young man, etc.), naming objects (*telkač* - TV set, *kulja* - an 'F' on a school test), currency (*marone* - German marks), buildings (*osnovnjak* - primary school), vehicles (*merđa* - Mercedes), places (*Švica* - Switzerland), etc.

In addition to individual slang words, we can often find slang phrases as well in contemporary novels. For instance, in the novel *The Apple Peel*, we find the following examples: "She told me that today I was just bothering them because I was just lugging around the apartment like an earthworm [...]" (Klepac, 2008, p. 12); "So, school today was a madhouse" (Klepac, 2008, p. 25); "Good brand, cool haircut, you lost a bit of weight, you're as fat as a pig, and so on." (Klepac, 2008, p. 31).

It is precisely the influence of popular culture that has embraced slang in the media, after which it spread into children's everyday lives, which contributed to the spread of slang and its general acceptance. Its expansion was particularly influenced by the emergence of social networks and magazines for young people<sup>9</sup>.

### c) Loan-Words and Foreign Words

Children, surrounded by popular media, acquire certain words from foreign languages and use them in everyday speech. Regarding words from other languages in Croatian lexis, Anglicisms are the most frequent ones, both as loanwords and foreign words, and this appears to have occurred due to the status of English as a global language (cf. Filipan-Žignić, 2012, pp. 64-65). Modern children's novels have embraced this phenomenon in order to better express the authentic speech of children. The use of Anglicisms and foreign words is most vividly expressed in the novels *Got Facebook?*, *Don't Tell Anyone* and *The Apple Peel*. These novels feature Anglicisms related to the

<sup>9</sup> These are magazines such as *Teen* (launched in 1994 and still being published) (cf. <http://bestseller209.rssing.com/>), *Ok!* (launched in 1995 and still being published) (cf. Macukić, 2015), *Gle!* (launched in 2011) (cf. <http://www.24sata.hr/novi-magazin-gle-citat-ce-tinejdzeri-ali-i-njihovi-roditelji-238644>), and the like.

world of technology (*konektiranje* - connecting to the Internet, *skrolanje* - horizontal or vertical scrolling through content on a website, *smajlići* - Smilies or emoticons/emoji), certain actions (*šopingirati* - go shopping, *spikati* - talk/chat, *ići na dejt* - go on a date) and situations (*filing* - a feeling, *biti bad* - be bad), as well as certain professions (*tičERICA* - the teacher). Words taken from English are also connected with names of celebrities (*Johnny Depp*, *Beyoncé*, *Rihanna*, *Sarah Jessica Parker*, *Elvis*, *Armani*, etc.), popular characters from the world of films and computer games (*Spiderman*, *Lara Croft*), popular magazines (*Stardust*), titles of popular songs (*Love game*, *Bad romance*, *It's my life*), music genres (*rock*, *death metal*), the world of technology (*online*, *chat*, *cyber friend*, *nick*, *e-mail*, *inbox*), Internet nicknames (*Hot Girl*, *Tommy Boy*), appearance (*in*, *fancy*, *cool*, *to pick an outfit*), feelings (*bad*), cosmetics (*Chanel 5*, *Lovely*, *Brit Red*), jewellery (*Swarovski*), actions (*casting*, *blind date*), and even profanities (*f\*\*k off*). In borrowing these words, the impact of popular culture is crucial - especially the influence of films, music, comic books, and along with those (and through them), famous brands. It is interesting, for example, that in the novel *Don't Tell Anyone* the complete lyrics of Beyoncé's song 'If I were a boy' are visually separated from the narrative text.

In addition to English, of course, elements of other languages are occasionally used, but their primary function is mainly referencing the origin of the characters, and not portraying the impact of popular culture on the contemporary life of children and young people.

#### d) Fictional Languages

In contemporary children's novels, sometimes we can also find languages which do not exist in reality. For example, in *Crumbs from the Living Room*, a so-called "robot language" is used. This language is also visually separated from the rest of the text, so as to emphasise its uniqueness. In fact, it is written in capital letters, between which there are dashes that connect letters suggesting Robotko's robotic slowness in speech: "I-A-M-A-BIT-A-F-R-A-I-D-O-F-T-H-A-T - he said. - I-W-O-U-L-D-N-O-T-L-I-K-E-T-O-B-E-D-I-S-A-P-P-O-I-N-T-E-D...M-R-S-S-O-V-I-Ć-T-O-L-D-M-E-T-H-A-T-WE-H-A-V-E-T-O-S-T-R-U-G-G-L-E-I-N-L-I-F-E..." (Pilić, 2009, p. 92).

A fictional language also appears in the novel *Eco, Eco*, for the purpose of illustrating the speech of alien beings. The speech of aliens in this novel is not visually separated from the text, but rather characterised by repeated words that create the illusion of echo in the boundless space of the universe (cf. Hitrec, 2009, p. 37).

#### e) The Language of Young People on Social Networks

The language which young people are using on social networks, but also in their correspondence with peers via text messages cannot be classified in any category of languages. This is not the standard language, as it is close to spoken language, and it does

<sup>10</sup> Found on <http://www.planb.hr/kako-je-web-promijenio-jezik/>

not follow any grammar or spelling rules of standard language or individual dialects. It is characterised by the influence of the English language, the use of emoticons, grammatical and orthographical irregularities, expressing emotional states by listing series of letters, the use of profanity, barbarisms, etc. (cf. Grbačić, 2013<sup>10</sup>). Its development was influenced by the media and popular culture that young people are in immediate contact with. The result of such an impact is a distinctive voice, sometimes humorous and effective, but also often poor, uninventive and grammatically and orthographically incorrect. This is evident in the following example from the novel *Got Facebook?*: “About eight o’clock, Tena’s message arrived: ‘Had coff w/ that guy, hesawsm, plays in death metal band, u kno how tht makes me feel. and chk this out. came back 2 victors, he shows me condoms and sezhed try w/ me, havent seen a bigger idiot ever in my life. L8r” (Tihi-Stepanić, 2011, p. 92). This fragment indicates irregularities in writing capital and small letters, punctuation, the incorrect spelling of words and intentional omission of letters, and more.

## Conclusion

If we compare the characters of children’s novels that dominated the end of the last and, especially, the beginning of the new century with some of the children’s classics which emerged some decades earlier, such as novels by Mato Lovrak, Milivoj Matošec, Zvonimir Milčec, Ivan Kušan, and others, we shall immediately notice numerous differences, where we shall be able to view most of them through the prism of contemporary popular culture, which influences almost all spheres of life, including children’s literature. Being a part of contemporary times themselves, certain authors of today are definitely aware of the scope and impact of popular culture and therefore continue to implant it in their literary worlds, perhaps to give authenticity and receptivity to their work, to be read and accepted, to become close with the readers with whom they share the same social reality. On the other hand, there are certainly those pop culture forces which, because of the lack of relevant temporal distance, even the authors themselves are not aware of, that enter the texts inadvertently, through inertia and the logic of the sociohistorical moment.

The characters of contemporary Croatian children’s novels are at many levels different from the characters that have preceded them in literary history. First of all, they present a different world-view that is largely predetermined by the popular and consumerist mentality, urban areas and the increasingly intensive interest in topics that used to be social taboos a couple of decades ago, such as, for example, atypical sexual orientation, or mental deficiency. Furthermore, the socio-psychological habitus of contemporary children’s characters is greatly different than the one present in earlier children’s novels. In today’s novels, we encounter characters of all social classes who often intensely observe, but also reflect, the very social issues which surround them, such as issues of unemployment, cost-effective and less cost-effective work, desirable and less desirable social positions, and many others. We often witness a sort of inversion of roles at the child-adult level, so the children in the novels are almost smarter and more mature than their immature or troubled parents. In some novels, ironic, satirical and/or humorous

procedures often expose the general social background, although such questions are, of course, not the centre of interest in children's novels. Great changes occur at the level of gender stereotypes that subvert, re-evaluate, or are used for humorous effect. Also, under the influence of popular culture, we notice a significant number of characters that have expanded the very popular art practices mediated through the media of television, comics and films, which have previously appeared sporadically, or in completely different contexts, such as the characters of robots, aliens and toys. And last, but not the least, the speech of the characters of contemporary Croatian children's novels reveals precisely those popular linguistic phenomena that we recognise in modern reality, which, mostly because of the Internet and social networks, significantly change the manifest image of the Croatian language, distancing it from its standard.

Since the character is the main constituent element of children's novels, the changes that affect the presentation of a novelistic character are those most visible to the reader, and these are often poetically crucial because they indicate deeper changes of novelistic paradigms. Also, the characters are that element of the story with which the reader is most easily identified, one serving as a role model, or to which readers compare themselves. In the case of literature for children and/or young people, this particular fact is becoming increasingly important, as we are dealing with the population in the period of intensive development, and a literary text can significantly affect all aspects of forming intellectual, moral, social and aesthetic values of the reader. The interest in the study of the influence of popular culture on the characters that we find in modern novels, is, therefore, clearer - because the changes related to literary characters are, in a way, reflected in the young readers of today, just as the same reality, and with it the child readers, affects the formative processes of the children's novel. Such processes, in which we can assume the influence of popular culture, as shown in this work, although numerous and intense, are still not subject to a unilateral assessment - neither from the aesthetic nor from the educational point of view.

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# Utjecaj popularne kulture na oblikovanje likova u suvremenom hrvatskom dječjem romanu

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## Sažetak

*Utjecaj popularne kulture na suvremeni dječji roman višestruk je i slojevit te se reflektira na svim diskurzivnim razinama. U radu se razmatraju elementi i strategije popularne kulture koje možemo uočiti u suvremenom hrvatskom dječjem romanu (točnije, u romanima objavljenima u razdoblju od 1970. do danas, kada je popularna kultura doživjela osobit procvat), a koji su vidljivi u koncepcijama oblikovanja romanesknih likova. Analitičkim uvidom u likove pojedinih dječjih romana nastalih u navedenom razdoblju, s obzirom na različite aspekte kao što su svjetonazorski i idejni kompleks, jezični habitus, socijalna i psihološka podloga likova, opozicija djeca – odrasli, uloga rodni stereotipa i determiniranost tipičnim motivima suvremenih popularnokulturnih praksi (ponajprije vezanih uz urbane sredine kao središta zabave i potrošnje), detektira se način i obim utjecaja popularne kulture u kontekstu suvremenog hrvatskog dječjeg romana. Navedeno se, s jedne strane, razmatra s obzirom na generalni odnos popularne kulture i književnosti namijenjene djeci (kako starije, tako i ovdje tematizirane, suvremene) dok se, s druge strane, povezuje s postmodernim odrednicama suvremenih društvenih i kulturnih (osobito književnih) praksi.*

**Ključne riječi:** konzumerizam; likovi; popularna kultura; postmoderna; suvremeni hrvatski dječji roman.